

POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN ALGERIAN REQUESTS

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ABSTRACT

One of the main crucial points in Sapir's understanding of the concept of language is that people's language habits play an important role in building the real world as language is the basic element in communication.

The importance of language in society and its socio-cultural aspects were neglected by the early studies like Structuralism and Generative Grammar. Nevertheless, some philosophers, in earlier paradigms, try to put emphasis on the pragmatic aspect of language study, Searle (1969) and Leech (1983) explain that through the utterance of sentences, people are performing communicative acts and social functions.

People are taught to be polite from their childhood, and it is noticeable that parents repeat the word "be polite" at home to their kids which shows the essential role of politeness in society.

This study is a sociolinguistic investigation into the ways in which Algerian speakers realize requests with reference to politeness strategies as proposed by Brown and Levinson, and request strategies as patterned by Blum-Kulka (1989). The paper is based on the analysis of elicited responses of sixty participants, consisting of neighbours and friends. Data was collected by serving them a written questionnaire based on Blum-Kulka (1989) request strategies and Brown and Levinson model.

The results reveal that there is a preference by speakers towards the use of direct strategies of requesting and positive politeness strategies.

KEYWORDS: Politeness Strategies - Requests- Blum-Kulka Paradigm - Brown and Levinson Model

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INTRODUCTION

Politeness phenomenon seems to be complex in nature, which leads to a variety of approaches to the conceptualization of the concept. Its form might differ from one group to another and from one culture to another. It has become one of the major subjects in pragmatics.

Politeness and the Speech Act of Request

Considerable attention has been paid to the different strategies that speakers use when performing speech acts. As far as speech acts are concerned, requests are mostly common in daily interaction and many investigations have been carried out in requests in both cross-cultural and interlanguage studies.

People use requests frequently in their everyday conversations and interaction. They try to catch the hearer's attention and make an imposition on him/her. According to Brown and Levinson's 1987, requests are face-threatening acts (FTAs) which threaten the hearer's negative face. Thus, when performing a request, it is needed to reduce the level of the imposition of the act in order to save the hearer's face.

Requests are considered to be a good example of speech acts that imply an intrusion on the hearer's territory, it is to threaten his or her "negative face" and limit their freedom. In general, the speaker making a request requires the hearer or addressee to do an action which is of benefit to the speaker. And in order to perform this, the speaker needs to deploy some strategies to minimize the imposition of the request that may make the addressee in trouble.

Three primary social factors influence the performance of requests in terms of the level of politeness. They are: degree of social distance, power and rank of imposition.

Politeness Strategies in Requests

In this chapter, the analysis of the data obtained by an Algerian speech community's (Tlemcen) participants is presented along with the interpretations of results. It relies on the politeness strategies of Brown and Levinson's (1987) and the request strategies as identified by Blum-Kulka (1989).

METHOD

The Sample

Sixty subjects took part in this work. The participants were classified according to their age and gender. Age was chosen as a variable because politeness strategies may differ and vary with different age groups, they were between 35 and 50 years old (one age group). Gender was also considered, 32 females and 28 males contributed.

The Data Collection Procedure

For data elicitation; the Discourse Completion Test (DCT) is used. The DCT is a kind of questionnaire used to collect sociolinguistic data, where the respondents react to make requests in some situations. This test was designed by Blum-Kulka in 1982 and has been widely adopted in collecting data on speech acts realization.

The questionnaire identified in this study contains five situations, each situation varies according to a number of social factors: the relative social power of the respondents, the social distance between interactants and the request ranking, in addition to the age and gender factors. In each situation, there is a description that shows the relations between participants be it a close or a stranger, and their dominance over each other (high, equal or low). The questionnaire asks the subjects to fill in with what they would say in each situation. They were asked to respond as if they are in real situations and they answer using their own dialect and not standard Arabic.

This study is carried out to examine the politeness strategies used in the speech act of requests among Algerian speakers. Three questions are raised: question one is whether Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies are applicable in this Algerian society, and on the other hand, whether speakers of this community adopt Blum-Kulka's request patterns. The second and the third ones are related to age and gender parameters and their effect on politeness strategies. Therefore, this study tries to answer these questions.

RESULTS

According to the results of this investigation, in trying to answer question one, it is found that the five politeness strategies of Brown and Levinson's model are adopted in this speech community (Tlemcen), and they are used according to the context. So, many similarities are observed.

As far as Blum-kulak's request strategies are concerned, it is noticed that they really exist in this community, conventional indirectness, mostly produced by means of query preparatory and hints, and directness by means of mood derivable and want/need statements. Thus, it is observed that directness is realized by means of positive and bald-on-record strategies, and indirectness through negative and off-record strategies.

Concerning age and gender, they play crucial roles in the production of requests. When it is the case of old people, indirectness is used due to the respect. And the old when speaking to young people use directness dominates.

When the interaction is between interactants of the same sex, i.e. males or females, there is a tendency towards positive and direct strategies neglecting indirectness. However, when the interaction is between males and females, due to the respect exchanged between the two genders most of the time indirect strategies are used.

Algerian Arabic speakers' use of politeness strategies varies according to the contexts and situations. When the interaction is between brothers, there is a preference towards high levels of directness without the fear of losing face, because the relation is closer. Whereas, when the rank or degree of imposition of the speech act is high like in the example of borrowing money, directness is adopted and linked with softeners like: "Allah ykhalik".

Table 1: Politeness Strategies Used between Brothers

Politeness Strategies	Request from a Brother	
Positive politeness	41	68,34 %
Negative politeness	6	10 %
Bald-on Record	11	18,33 %
Off- Record	2	3,33 %

It is noticed that most respondents use bald-on-record strategy to ask their brothers for help, they have adopted the most direct ways and the less formal speech and this is due to the nature of relationship between brothers and which does not require any indirect speech or formality.

However, when it is the case of interaction between friends, Algerian speakers switch between the direct and indirect strategies using softeners, and thus, between positive and negative strategies.

Table 2: Politeness Strategies between Friends

Politeness Strategies	Request from a Friend	
Positive politeness	29	48,33 %
Negative politeness	16	26,67 %
Bald-on Record	15	25 %

In this table, it is shown that there is a tendency towards the use of the positive and negative strategies since the act of requesting for help is low in ranking. Respondents may not choose the indirect ways to produce their requests and they may not feel embarrassing the hearers with this act.

CONCLUSIONS

In fact, most previous studies on politeness phenomenon have focused on Western languages and dialects. This paper reveals cross-cultural speech act performance in an Arabic variety or dialect. It is necessary to understand when and why such strategies are utilized, and what factors influence their use. In this study, it is noticed that the tendency towards the use of certain strategies in requests is related to the following variables such as: age, gender and the relationship between the interactants.

It is illustrated in the findings that in Algerian Arabic, there is a preference towards higher levels of directness and positive strategies. Directness dominates in the Algerian speakers interactions without the fear of losing face.

When the interaction is addressed to the Imam, the negative and off-record strategies are adopted more; otherwise, positive politeness strategies are dominant in all cases.

Finally, the current study demonstrates that polite request strategies and politeness strategies vary from a culture to another. Algerian speakers utilize direct strategies with softeners to mitigate their requests. Direct strategies are considered as solidarity politeness strategies because they entail that the speaker considers a small social distance between him/herself and the addressee.

Without a doubt, Cross-cultural pragmatics (CCP) has contributed to develop our understanding of speech acts across cultures taking into account both the universality of certain language functions like promising, requesting, etc and the cultural aspects.

In this respect, Blum-Kulka et al. (1989: 24) propose that “to understand how international styles form a part of a culture’s ethos and determine the meanings attached to communication, we would need to enrich our studies of observed behaviour by studies of perception of linguistic behaviour that offer similar choices of directness levels, for example, carry culturally, differentiated meaning for members of different cultures”.

Indeed, the cross-cultural study of speech acts is very crucial vital to the understanding of the communication all over the world.

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APPENDICES

Appendix: Discourse Completion Test (Dct)

Sex

Age

Please read the following descriptions of situations and write what you would say in each situation using your own dialect.

Situation One

You need a sum of money, how will ask these people to lend it to you?

Your neighbour

Your friend

Your brother

Situation Two

You are in a bus and the weather is cold, you want someone sitting behind the window to close it, how will you ask for it from these people?

A man

A woman

Situation Three

You want to visit a friend but you do not know his or her address, how will you ask these people for the address?

Someone younger than you.

Someone the same age as you

Someone older than you

Situation Four

You want to carry a heavy box to your home, how will you ask for help from?

Your neighbour

Your friend

Your brother

Situation Five

You have got a set of questions concerning religious matters, how will you ask the priest “Imam” of your region to answer them for you?